

# Individual vs. Society in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart

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## Abstract-

*In African Novels the conflict between Individual vs. Society begun right from in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Individual fought for his own identity and cultural identity of his country. He never accepts missionaries' schools, churches in his country as well as culture of colonizer. He better knew that slavery was not good. Colonizers behavior was like animal to the colonized. It as the wretched of the earth according to Frantz Fanon, South African writer. The present paper focuses that the protagonist of the novel Okonkwo who constantly fought with the missionaries, but society was not with him, on the contrary it tried to convince him that not go to against Whites. But Okonkwo was firm on his decision because he knew that African tradition and culture is important than the missionaries.*

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## Introduction

The African novel is known for various cultural tensions and modernity, the real and the occult, known and unknown and so on. But it is the conflict between the individual and the society and the way in which it is resolved that seems to lend a typical African flavor to the African novel, thus distinguishing it from its European counterpart. The event of a clash between individual and the society, the scores are more commonly settled in favor of the individual as against the society in the European novel as could be seen in the case of Dorothea in George Eliot's Middlemarch. And the reverse is always the case in an African novel in which society, the larger entity, emerges triumphant as against the individual who dissociates or delinks himself from the society to assert his pride and individuality. The question is not so much about the right or wrong of the individual's convictions or credentials as about the in necessity of the people to adhere to the society. They believe and depend on its power to hold them together as the 'centre'. It is because of this 'centre', they could survive the hardest of times. With this kind of confidence being laid on society, it is not surprising to see even the closest of the individual's associates and kinsman deserting the individual in the event of his clash with the society. The individual has practically no stakes against the society.

A study of Chinua Achebe's Things fall Apart with special emphasis on the aspect 'Individual vs. society. 'Things fall Apart, set in a pre-colonial situation, depicts Okonkwo's rise and fall. As Okonkwo claims himself a champion of the Igbo tradition, in his fall, we visualize a proud and stable society gradually disintegration and being destroyed by the encroachment of an alien society. Okonkwo was the Igbo hero, in that he showed exceptional bravery, firmness, even greatness of soul. "He was well-known throughout the nine village and

even beyond. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honor of his village by throwing Amalinze, the cat” (p.25) Amalinze as great wrestler who remained unbeaten for seven years. Oknokow was proud and was the brave man of Umofia in every sense. His life was dominated by the local customs and fear of being called weak. It was this fear which prevented him from being openly affectionate towards Ikemefuna his foster son. He even goes to the extent of cutting him down with hatchet which was the most telling of his aberrations. Okonkwo, though he was the staunch follower of the local customs, happened to flout certain norms of his society in a significant aspects and in doing so brings many of his own ills upon his head. He is twice punished for his crimes against Ani, the earth Goddess, first when he beat his wife during the ‘peace of week’ and next when his gun killed Ezeulu’s son by accident. For this, he accepted the penalty and went exile to his motherland, Mbanta. By the time he returned to rebuild his reputation in Umuofia, he finds the Whiteman’s rule established. He tries to stand as a rock against invasion.

His helplessness and frustration are clearly evident in his blind fury in which he almost kills his son Nwoye, what he comes to know that the boy had frequenting the missionaries. And the and when the boy forsakes his parents and becomes a convert, a *“sudden fury rose within him and he felt as strong desire to take up his hatchet, go to the church and wipe out the entire vile miscreant gang”* (p.94) he wants his people to go to war.

Okonkwo, who turned out be the odd man out in his community even before there was any confrontation with the Whiteman, now becomes even more alienated from his community in his attempt to assert his individuality. And his only recourse is to rebellion against the Whiteman But the traditional society being aware of its weakness does not want confront the Whiteman’s power, kills the messenger of the district commissioner. And in the question of his clansmen, ‘why did he do it? He realizes that the world to which belonged is dead and no longer with him, and he hangs himself knowing fully well that it was an abomination, an offence against the earth. His clansmen, while approving his more moderate ambitions, do not hesitate to criticize him for his excess and deviations in urging him to follow the accepted social restraints and expectations.

Okonkwo , no doubt is a worthy person, a man of conviction with a strength of character. But in his attempts to his own conviction, he goes too far to the extent of dissociating himself from the society, the macrocosm. For this a streak of pride, a sense of “hubris” within him is responsible. It impairs his sense of acknowledging the supremacy of the society, the “Centre” which holds them all together. For this, he has to pay too heavy price”, dying like a dog.” (P.108) Oberika one of the closest friend says, “that man was one of the greatest men of Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; now he will be buried like a dog because of his pride which delinked him from the society and acted from within, many of his clansmen would have been with him even if it meant going against the Whiteman, and he would have a ceremonial burial by his people, one of the privileges.

Achebe thus presents the conflict between individual and the society and its consequences in pre-colonial society in a neutral fashion without taking sides either with the individual or with the society. As a disinterested and neutral observer he succeeds in exposing the good and evil prevailing in the native African culture and an alien culture. He neither romanticize the Igbo society nor vilifies the Christian European

behavior as a whole. He traces the process of the falling apart of the society and the loss of a unified pattern as outside forces play on the new generation.

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